

Message Text

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43

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R 111356Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5223

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM POUCH

AMEMBASSY KIGALI POUCH

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA POUCH

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0108

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAGR, EAID, SPOP, BY

SUBJECT: BURUNDI ELITE AWAKEN TO POPULATION AND FOOD CRISES

1. SUMMARY. AFTER YEARS BOTH OF RELATIVE INDIFFERENCE TO FOOD (AS DISTINCT FROM EXPORT) CROP PRODUCTION AND OF TOTAL OPPOSITION EVEN TO CONSIDERATION OF POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING QUESTIONS, BURUNDI'S ELITE ESTABLISHMENT IS IN THE MIDST OF A COMPLETE SOMERSAULTM. THE REGIME IS SPEAKING OPENLY OF A GRAVE CRISIS WITHIN 5 TO 10 YEARS AND IS INDICATING GREAT RECEPTIVENESS TO WHATEVER REAL FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN THESE FIELDS CAN BE OFFERED. IF EVER THERE WERE A TIME WHEN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS VIA BILATERAL AID PROJECTS IN THESE AREAS WOULD MAKE AN IMPACT, NOW (I.E. FY1977) IS IT. END SUMMARY.

2. IN TERMS OF GENERAL PUBLIC AWARENESS, THE MAIN SIGNAL OF THE TURNAROUND HAS BEEN A "SEMINAR" HELD FROM JANUARY 26 TO 30 INVOLVING BULK OF MINISTERS, ALL 8 PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS, ALL 18 DISTRICT CHIEFS, AND CHIEF REGIONAL AGRONOMISTS. STATEMENTS AT SESSIONS WERE EXTENSIVELY, IF NOT TOTALLY, REPORTED ON RADIO AND IN DAILY PRESS BULLETIN, AND DEGREE OF CANDOR TOLERATED WAS UNPRECEDENTED. WHILE REVELATIONS TOUCHED ON MANY ASPECTS OF GRAVE
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NATIONAL BUDGET PROBLEMS, PAST AND PRESENT PLANNING FAILURES, THE

TRAVESTY OF HEALTH CARE, AND THE DETERIORATION OF UPRONA PARTY ELAN AND EFFECTIVENESS, THE MOST STARTLING NEWS CAME IN THE FOOD AND POPULATION SECTORS. SPEAKER AFTER SPEAKER REFERRED TO FOOD SHORTAGES, PROSPECTIVE FAMINE, RAPIDLY ERODING SOILS, FOOD CROP YIELDS DECLINING FROM YEAR TO YEAR, AND INCREASING NUMBERS OF ENTIRELY LANDLESS PEASANTS. THE HERETOFORE TABOO WORDS "FAMILY PLANNING" APPEARED IN PRINT, THOUGH SPEAKERS SAID THAT SPACING OF BIRTHS WOULD MORE CONGENIAL TO BURUNDIAN SENSIBILITIES.

3. THE PUBLISHED RESOLUTIONS OF THE SEMINARY SPOKE OF PRIORITIES FOR ANTI EROSION WORK, POPULATION RELOCATION TO LESS DENSELY SETTLED AREAS (AT BEST, A SHORT TERM PALLIATIVE), GREATER ATTENTION TO FOOD CROPS, AND A MUCH MORE ACTIVE COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAM TO ACHIEVE THESE PRIORITIES. WE KNOW INDEPENDENTLY THAT MOST OF THESE ISSUES HAD BEEN DISCUSSED AT A RECENT CABINET MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MICOMBERO IN ATTENDANCE, AND THAT A CONSENSUS EMERGED ON THE SERIOUS THREAT TO THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE POSED BY THESE FOOD-POPULATION PROBLEMS. APART FROM APPROVED PALLIATIVES, HOWEVER, SUCH AS SMALL SCALE POPULATION TRANSFER AND A FOOD WAREHOUSING AND GOVERNMENT MARKETING SCHEME TO SPREAD SUPPLIES AND CURB SPECULATION, BASIC SOLUTIONS REQUIRE DRASTIC ACTIONS DIFFICULT TO CARRY OUT. INDEED, ONE WOULD HAVE TO OVERCOME THE GENERAL BUREAUCRATIC MALAISE, THE INERTIA OF TRADITIONAL DIFFICULTIES OF INNOVATION, THE UNCHANGING YAWNING GAPS IN ADEQUATELY TRAINED PERSONNEL, AND THE CHRONIC LACK OF SUFFICIENT BUDGETARY SUPPORT EVEN FOR EXISTING PERSONNEL AND PROGRAMS, MUCH LESS FOR VITALLY NECESSARY ADDITIONS.

4. ON TOP OF THESE SOCIAL-ADMINISTRATIVE CONSTRAINTS, THERE ARE ENDURING OBJECTIVE ONES. CRUCIAL ANTI-EROSION WORK REQUIRES THE REMOVAL OF SOME ARABLE LAND FROM CULTIVATION, WHEN NONE CAN BE SPARED. YET, WITHOUT ANTI-EROSION EFFORTS, SOIL PRODUCTIVITY WILL CONTINUE TO PLUMMET. ANIMAL OVERGRAZING MUST ALSO BE STOPPED AND HERDS REDUCED: YET THERE IS ALREADY A BAD PROTEIN SHORTAGE AND A MAXIMUM IN MANURE COLLECTION IS ESSENTIAL FOR ENHANCED CROP YIELDS IN THE VIRTUAL ABSENCE OF OTHER FERTILIZERS. FURTHER CRISIS IN 5 TO 8 YEARS WILL COME ON THE FUEL FRONT, WITH ALL-IMPORTANT WOOD RUNNING OUT, WITH REFORESTATION ON THE NECESSARY SCALE IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE, AND WITH LITTLE

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BEING DONE TO DEVELOP VITAL (BUT ECOLOGICALLY QUESTIONABLE) SOURCES OF PEAT, THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE.

5. BURUNDI'S ACCELERATING CRISIS IS NOT REALLY ONE AFFECTING PRIMARILY THE THIN LAYER OF MODERNIZED INSTITUTIONS (THOUGH THESE HAVE SERIOUS SEPARATE DIFFICULTIES OF THEIR OWN), BUT RATHER ONE BEARING DOWN ON THE LARGELY HUTU PEASANT MASSES, COMPRISING 95 PERCENT OF THE NATION. THE 30 TO 40 MILLION

DOLLARS

OF ANNUAL FOREIGN AID HAVE GONE OVERWHELMINGLY TO THIS MODERN SECTOR-ROADS, MINING SURVEYS, EXPORT CROP PROMOTION, SECONDARY AND COLLEGE LEVEL EDUCATION, URBAN UTILITIES, TOURISM, AND TELE-COMMUNICATIONS. IT WAS IRONICALLY INSTRUCTIVE THAT, IN THE INTERIOR MINISTER'S SPEECH AT THE SEMINAR LISTING ALL THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF MICOMBERO'S REGIME, EVERY ITEM MENTIONED HAD A SIGNIFICANT FOREIGN AID COMPONENT, AND FOOD OUTPUT WAS IGNORED.

6. FORTUNATELY, WORLDWIDE AMERICAN AID POLICY IS CONCENTRATING PRICISELY ON THE AREAS CRITICAL FOR BURUNDI, SO LONG NEGLECTED BY BUJUMBURA AND EXTERNAL DONORS ALIKE-FOOD PRODUCTION, HEALTH, PRIMARY EDUCATION, AND FAMILY PLANNING. NO DOUBT, AUTHORITIES HERE WILL NOW ALSO TRY TO BEGIN TO PUSH MAJOR AID GIVERS TOWARDS THESE NEW PRIORITIES, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT OUR INVALUABLE STOREHOUSE OF EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICAL PROGRAMS CAN BE READILY MATCHED. IN MY VIEW, IN SUCH A SITUATION, IT BORDERS ON THE INDECENT FOR THE UNITED STATES NOT TO BE OFFERING HELP WITH CONDITIONS WHICH WILL BECOME DESPERATE IN THIS DECADE. IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THE POLITICAL FACTORS WHICH HAVE CAUSED US TO HESITATE FOR SO LONG ON AID (AND WHICH ARE IN ANY EVENT LESS RELEVANT AND LESS OPERATIVE THAN A FEW YEARS AGO) SHOULD STILL REMAIN CONCLUSIVE IN THE FACE OF SUCH DIRE NEED AND OF THE DECLARED AID POLICY OF OUR CONGRESS TOWARD THE WORLD'S POOREST COUNTRIES.

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